

THE COLONIES.

II.

To the Editor of the Times.

Sir:—In my last letter I contended that the colony which is most exposed of all was defensible in case of war, and that on the grounds of military expediency it would be more to the advantage of England to defend than to retire from Canada. Let me now look at the alternative of the case: that Canada is given up, and that the whole Confederation in any future struggle is neutral. This, it is to be kept in mind, involves the consequences that on no part of the Atlantic coast north of Bermuda, nor on the American side of the Pacific Ocean, would England possess a single harbour where she could coal, or refit a vessel, or obtain supplies. To repair damages a ship must return to England, and if the United States were left free to operate with all their power against Bermuda, how long could that Island be held? Being within easy access of the United States, it must, at all events, however guarded against reduction or actual capture, be closely blockaded, and for all effectual purposes would be useless. If Bermuda fell how long would the West Indies remain British? And might not the contagion extend to Australia and other colonies of the empire? If Canada were abandoned on the ground that she was difficult to defend, would the Pacific or Australian colonies not claim the right to be neutral. In the language of Lord Grey, "the policy of abandoning a part of our colonial empire could scarcely be adopted without giving so great a shock to the feeling of confidence and security in the remainder as greatly to increase the difficulty of maintaining it." England would thus be deprived of active allies, numbering nearly seven millions of people, all over the globe, and her enemy would gain immensely in the means of inflicting injury on her commerce in every sea. And what of the fact that Newfoundland is within six days steaming of Ireland? If all the ships of England are to be withdrawn from the American possessions, that Island at once becomes a safe base of operations against Ireland whence men and munitions of war could and would be despatched as opportunity or the chances of success warranted.

To sum up, therefore, in such a war, if the policy of abandonment is to be followed, England loses whatever advantage is to be found in the alliance and active support derived from Canada alone of half a million of fighting men, of whom 70,000 are as hardy seamen as the world can produce; of the employment of a very large share of the enemy's resources and men in difficult and exhausting expeditions; in having no harbours to repair and coal her ships and to fit out expeditions within easy access of the enemy's country, and of so being able to harass a coasting trade which extends from Maine to Cape Horn and from Cape Horn to the Columbia River. She relinquishes besides, all hope of executing what some regard as a strategic operation possessing elements of probable success—a descent on California by a force drawn from India and collected at Vancouver's Island; and above all, she risks alienating the active support of every other possession and turning them, if no worse befalls, into the condition of neutrals; and she furnishes a safe footing to a hostile force on an island less than six days' sail from Ireland.

It is true that by the course of abandonment she would avoid some strain on her own resources, but as the men for defensive

operations and the transport and commissariat would be mainly found by Canada, whose power to supply them is increasing every year in an enormous ratio, England's contribution would be chiefly in those things of which she would have a superabundance, and could not employ elsewhere,—viz, munitions of war, ships, experienced officers, and a sufficient contingent of regular troops and disciplined seamen to support the militia and naval reserves of the country. If the policy were to limit the war to the defence of England itself, the protection of the commerce of England at sea, and the inflicting loss on that of the enemy, the area must necessarily be confined to those parts of the world where England possessed harbours for refitting and stations for coal.

But it may be said—granted that a war may be carried on so as to inflict heavy loss on both, and that the absolute conquest of Canada by the United States might be resisted, yet that a war at all with such a nation is an evil so mighty as to call for the removal of all possible occasion for it; that the existence of Canada as a British territory is a source of danger both to herself and the Empire, and that apprehensions of the consequences to Canada prevent England from taking ground on issues with America becoming her national dignity and honour!

Let us try the fairness of this argument by the test of history. Have any of the causes which have threatened war been attributable either to the position, the acts, or the policy of Canada? The Oregon boundary dispute, the San Juan affair, the Trent affair, the enlistment question, the difficulty respecting the Island of Ruanan, the Alabama depredations, would all have occurred, and possibly have been followed by less pacific solutions, if Canada had never existed.

It is true that during the Confederate war difficulties of a serious character occurred almost daily, which called for the exercise of the utmost vigilance on the part of the Colonial Government, and which, if that Government had erred, might have involved England in the alternative of a war or the humiliation of an apology. Bodies of men in the interest of the Southern Confederation endeavoured to make British America the basis of hostile operations against a friendly Power, and though many in Canada, exercising the undoubted right of individual opinion, sympathized with the one side or the other, the action of her Government under these trying events was such as to call forth the repeated and grateful acknowledgments of the United States for the faithful performance of her international duties.

Thus far, therefore, and that, too, under circumstances of such delicacy as are not likely to recur for many years, the position and acts of Canada have not proved in themselves a source of danger. May it not be asserted that the policy of treating the larger colonies to assume the functions of nationality has been unwise, and that those functions—even when the independent exercise of them is devolved on the colony—may be discharged in entire harmony with the general interests of the empire.

Is it in her existence there? The answer may fairly be found in the facts which I think warrant the assertion that the United States are conscious they have territory enough and more in actual possession than they can consolidate during the life of this generation: that future accretion would be an evil, even if entailed on them in the course of nature; doubly an evil at the price of war, and an immeasurable one at the price of a war with England.

I believe I am justified in saying that while

the American Republic, at least the statesmen of the present day, would not object to receive Canada if in process of time she were, with the assent of England, to negotiate for admission, yet they are too sensible of the hazard, of the character of the resistance that would be offered and of the certain calamities, even if ultimately successful, which a war with England would entail, to encounter them for the sake of the acquisition of Canada. In the interests of peace these statesmen desire to have the means of proving to the American people that an attack on Canada is an operation so hazardous as not to be undertaken but on motives so cogent as to warrant their encountering the whole power of Great Britain, and that, in short, the attempted subjugation of Canada means war with England.

If there be truth in these views, and that the possession of Canada will be but a subsidiary incident, if an incident at all, in any future strife, may we not hesitate in giving credence to the oft-repeated idea that to her position is attributable what some call the spiritless policy of England in reference to the Alabama dispute?

May we not rather appreciate any state of things which induces either party to pause before entering on a strife which, if ever it does arise, will be one of which none can tell the end nor foresee the consequences? It cannot be said that in reference to any one of those past disputes the honor of England so far has been furnished. The elements of time and friendly discussion are often more potent than the sword.

If such arguments bearing on the supreme consideration of common peril, have any force as respects Canada, they hold doubly true in regard to all the other colonies, because none are exposed to the special danger to which the Dominion is subject.

We have now to consider the further objections of the disseverance party embodied in the words *profitless and burdensome*.

Let us take the case of Canada, again, as the one against which this charge has been most frequently made. It is said that the amount expended on the military and naval establishments is a heavy charge on the English tax-payer; that Canada will not raise the revenue by direct taxation, but imposes high duties on English manufactures, and gives them no advantage in their markets over those of any foreign nation; that it even asserts the right of negotiating with the United States as an independent Power, in relation to their mutual commercial intercourse; and that so little is England disposed to interfere with what Canada thinks best for its interest that she is prepared to stand by and let it make such treaties, to the partial exclusion of her own products that it obtains guarantees for objects in which it alone has an interest, and that, in fact, tested by the balance sheet, it is of no advantage whatever; but, on the contrary, is a source of recurring expense to the mother country.

How far are these charges true? The last occasion on which I am aware that the colonial expenditure was investigated was by the Parliamentary Committee of 1859. According to Mr. Merivale, who analyzed the items of expenditure enumerated in that report, the net outlay of Great Britain in times of peace, deducting imperial expenditure for military purposes on such fortified posts as Malta, Gibraltar, &c., was about two millions, of which one-fourth might be apportioned to the North American Colonies the most expensed of all.

On reference to the army estimates for last year I cannot make out that the expenditure especially chargeable on Canada